



Area lawyers mobilize to help troops for free

By Andrea Jackson - Times-News writer | Posted: Saturday, February 13, 2010 1:15 am

A handful of area lawyers discussed on Friday mobilizing a patriotic, pro-bono effort aimed at offering free legal assistance to soldiers expected to deploy soon with the Idaho Army National Guard.

Twin Falls lawyer Lynn Dunlap, a lieutenant colonel with the Guard, said Friday that an upcoming deployment is slated to involve 2,500 guardsmen from Idaho. He said servicemen expected to deploy to Iraq in August will need legal assistance for civil matters involving custody, child support, and creditor issues.

On Friday, Dunlap met with a judge and four other lawyers from the area to discuss the need.

Dunlap said most of the free legal assistance would involve a minimal time commitment, such as taking phone calls and filing forms. "I want these people to get help right away."

He said area lawyers should volunteer to help soldiers. "We have guys out in the sandbox, under attack," Dunlap said.

Soldiers shouldn't be distracted by legal issues at home during a deployment, said Dunlap, adding that free assistance would only help.

Dunlap said most of the 300 to 400 cases he handled during the last deployment were handled for free and typically resolved quickly. "We did a good job last time," said Dunlap, adding, "We're going to do a better job this time."

There isn't yet a pool of lawyers pledging support for the effort, he said, but at least four attorneys who met Friday were willing to lend a hand, including: Mike McCarthy and Karen McCarthy, of the Twin Falls branch of Idaho Legal Aide Services Inc.; David Heida, president of the 5th District Bar Association; and Tony Valdez, chairperson for the Idaho Volunteer Lawyers Program.

Mike McCarthy, managing attorney for Idaho Legal Aide, said Friday that he anticipates at least 20 to 30 lawyers from the area's 5th Judicial District in south-central Idaho might participate in the initiative.

The Idaho State Bar urges lawyers to provide at least 50 hours of free legal services per year.

Heida provided his support Friday saying, "I'll be more than happy to help out. ... I think it's a good idea."

Judges can't work as lawyers in the effort, but they can assist in other ways such as by building momentum for the cause.

"It's a very patriotic, wonderful thing for us to be able to support this," said Cassia County Magistrate Judge Mick Hodges. "I wish I could do it."

Dunlap said that, by April or May, he would like to offer deploying soldiers with contact numbers of attorneys willing to help them at no cost.

Information: Dunlap, 734-5885, or the Idaho Volunteer Lawyers Program, 334-4500.

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